

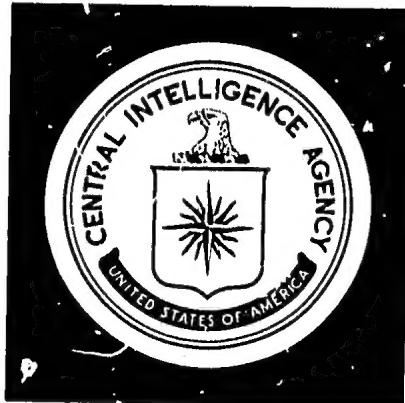
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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

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# Intelligence Report

*India's Divided Communists*

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1 September 1972  
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
1 September 1972

INTELLIGENCE REPORT

**India's Divided Communists**

For 50 years Indian Communists, representing a wide range of ideological bents, have struggled with little success to become a major political force. Poverty-ridden India would seem a fertile field for the Communists; yet Communism has never been able to attract widespread support. Almost from its inception in the 1920s, the Communist movement has been plagued by factionalism, personality clashes, fragmentation, and the policy constraints arising from twists and turns in the international Communist movement. Thus, during World War II, when the more powerful Congress Party continued to follow an anti-British line, the Communists, under Soviet direction, found themselves supporting Moscow's ally, Britain. This move discredited the Communists in the eyes of Indian nationalists and exacerbated intra-party tension as well.

After independence in 1947 the Communists remained outside India's political mainstream. The Communists led short-lived insurrections in the late forties against the Congress government, both in urban and later in rural areas, most notably in the Telengana district of the present state of Andhra Pradesh. By 1950 these operations were discontinued in the face of the Indian Army's overwhelming strength, and the Communists, at Moscow's insistence, decided to try the parliamentary path to power. In 1952, the Communists participated in independent India's first general elections. Communist candidates ran in all four subsequent national elections; despite a few local successes, the party never secured more than ten percent of the popular vote. This lack of success has naturally led to criticism of the leadership. Incessant wrangling over ideology and strategy has kept the movement splintered. India has not one Communist party but many. This disunity is a major deterrent to substantial expansion and the acquisition of real influence in Indian politics.

*Note: This report was produced by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of Economic Research and the Office of National Estimates.*

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## India



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**Party Mutations**

The Congress Party's domination of Indian politics is the major road-block for the Communists and helps explain the movement's propensity to divide over strategy alternatives. Serious divisions date back to the mid-1950s when, following Stalin's death, Moscow adopted a more conciliatory line. Some militants failed to fall into line, however, and chased as leaders loyal to Moscow retained firm control. The Communists' 1957 electoral victory in Kerala—the first Indian state to vote a Communist government into office—seemed to vindicate the party's parliamentary road. But in 1959 the central government in New Delhi took measures to topple the Communist-led coalition in Kerala, further alienating the militants. Their frustrations were translated into anti-Soviet sentiment, especially as the Sino-Soviet split developed and eroded the strict discipline of the world Communist movement.

Thereafter the facade of Indian Communist unity melted away, and the Sino-Indian border dispute—which erupted into open warfare in late 1962—served as the catalyst for a decisive polarization of the movement. The moderates, attempting to keep in step with Indian nationalist sentiment, strongly backed New Delhi. The pro-Chinese militants blamed the moderates for embracing the "bourgeois government" and for allegedly collaborating in the arrest of CPI members sympathetic to China. The formal split came in October 1964, following a leadership succession struggle. S. A. Dange, the right wing's leading spokesman, emerged as chairman of the Communist Party of India (CPI). The break-away faction constituted itself the "Marxist Communist Party of India" (CPM) and attacked the CPI as a tool of Soviet revisionism. As time proved, the CPM was no tool of Peking, becoming instead a separate and independent party.

Following the split, Moscow tried unsuccessfully to reunite the parties. The two cooperated on occasion, but in the 1967 parliamentary elections—in which both participated—they were unable to forge a national alliance. In some states they bitterly opposed each other. Shortly thereafter, the perennial parliamentary versus revolutionary path to power argument again erupted, this time within the CPM. The dispute reached a breaking point in 1967 when left extremists, who subscribed to Maoist doctrines, launched a peasant and tribal revolt in the strategic Naxalbari District in northern West Bengal. "Naxalite" soon became a household word in India, synonymous with violence and terrorism used to overthrow government institutions. Like-minded extremists in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala got together and formed a "Coordinating Committee of Communist Revolutionaries," but soon after setting up this body, they fell to quarreling over

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tactics and strategy. In May 1969, the West Bengal radicals struck out on their own and formed a third party, the Communist Party Marxist/Leninist (CPML). Today, the CPML is on the verge of collapse and Maoist Naxalites elsewhere in India are a demoralized lot struggling for survival.

#### **Membership**

The CPI and CPM are roughly equal in size; each has an estimated 70,000 active members. Both, however, use highly inflated figures; in 1971 the CPI carried 232,000 on its rolls while the CPM currently claims 105,000 activists. In the important 523-member lower house of parliament the two are about evenly matched, with the CPI holding 24 seats and the CPM 25. The CPI has the more legitimate claim to being a nationwide party, but both tend to rely on regional pockets of strength. In general, the CPI's largest constituencies are in West Bengal, Kerala, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Tamilnadu. The CPM, much less widely dispersed, has concentrations in Kerala (reportedly 39 percent of total CPM membership) and West Bengal (33 percent).

The CPML has, at most, only a few hundred adherents, a come down from the party's heyday a few years back when as many as 10,000 may have been associated with its activities.

The social and economic character of party membership varies according to area. The bulk of Communist support comes from the poorer sections of the population, but in some places it is drawn from the middle classes, including the educated unemployed in both rural and urban areas. In West Bengal, for example, Calcutta's middle-class clerical workers are traditionally moderate Communists, but radical factions have recruited heavily among upper middle-class students, as well as from the ranks of professional thugs. In densely populated Kerala, low-caste agricultural workers are Communists of long standing. In more industrialized states, factory labor constitutes the core of Communist support.

#### **Surveying the Future**

The Ruling Congress Party's sweep of the national elections in 1971 and of the state assembly elections in March 1972 forced the Communists to take a hard look at their own prospects for the future. Before Congress secured a two-thirds majority in the lower house of parliament last year, Prime Minister Gandhi had sought Communist votes. The Communists also had some influence in local affairs. In the elections last March in 16 states

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and 2 union territories the Ruling Congress won 77 percent of the 2,727 contested seats. The CPI won a mere four percent (112 seats) on the strength of alliances with the Ruling Congress in several states, while the CPM fell off to one percent (34 seats), losing more than 100 seats, primarily in West Bengal. In today's changed circumstances she has little need to cultivate the Communists.

### The CPI—Nothing New

The CPI operates within India's democratic system much like the other small opposition parties. It is still closely linked to the USSR and generally heeds Soviet counsel regarding strategy. In addition to attacks from the floor of parliament, it organizes frequent protest demonstrations against government policies and circulates large amounts of propaganda. Its array of peace, friendship, cultural and professional fronts attracts a small following, particularly from the educated middle class. The Communist-controlled All-India Trade Union Congress is probably the most influential of India's highly politicized labor organizations. This group's affiliates are responsible for a considerable amount of the violent labor agitation since the late 1960s.

In recent years the CPI's relationship with the Congress Party has fluctuated, ranging from total opposition in the 1967 election to a number of election alliances in the 1971 race. Many of the CPI's goals are compatible with Mrs. Gandhi's socialist-oriented platform, but the CPI believes policies are too conservative and the implementation too slow.

In 1968 the CPI made the pragmatic decision to seek to cooperate with the Ruling Congress, primarily because most of the coalition state governments in which the CPI, but not the Congress, participated had collapsed. CPI policy has long advocated a united front of left, democratic forces including the CPM, the various socialist parties, and "progressives" in the Ruling Congress. The CPI considers India to be in the pre-revolutionary stage when alliances with "progressive bourgeoisie" can be justified. The value of this course was illustrated last March when collaboration with the Ruling Congress led to some 93 of the CPI's 112 victories.

Nonetheless, a militant minority in the CPI opposes such cooperation, arguing that it circumscribes the CPI's agitational potential and muddies its ideological position. The majority, however, favor strengthening links with "radical democratic sections" of the Ruling Congress.

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**MRS. GANDHI'S TWELVE ELECTION PLEDGES***From the 1971 Election Manifesto*

The twelve election pledges, which the All India Congress Committee has directed the new government to implement, are to:

1. Continue the advance to socialism through democratic process and devise an administrative system capable of speeding implementation;
2. Put down the forces of violence and disorder so that all our citizens can live in peace and harmony;
3. Defend secularism and safeguard the interests of the minorities and the weaker sections of the community, particularly the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and the other backward sections so that they may attain "equality of status and opportunity and fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual";
4. End anachronistic privileges such as privy purses and reduce glaring disparities of income and opportunity;
5. Accelerate efforts to provide basic requirements to our people by undertaking a systematic programme of agricultural development by the application of science and technology and thereby usher in a new phase of rural prosperity, which will improve the condition of small farmers, farmers in dry areas, the landless, artisans, and others who eke out their existence through diverse skills;
6. Provide fresh avenues of employment and thus widen the participation of our citizens in nation-building activities;
7. Enlarge the role of the public sector and improve its performance;
8. Give scope to the private sector to play its proper role in the economy, while curbing the concentration of economic power and wealth;
9. Control prices and ensure to the people the supplies of essential commodities at reasonable rates;
10. Launch upon a programme of child welfare to provide nutritious diet to pre-school children;
11. Provide elementary education to all children and reshape secondary and higher education to suit the needs of the country; and
12. Effect for these purposes such amendments of the constitution as may be necessary.

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Shortly after the elections last March, CPI leaders endorsed a new national campaign to "Implement the People's Mandate." This is simply a new label for time-worn demands to eliminate landlordism, monopoly capitalism, high prices, inflation, and unemployment.

The CPI envisions the formation of a broad-based mass movement, supported by leftist sympathizers in the Ruling Congress, that will push the government toward socialism. Their immediate aim is to force quick action on the ruling party's commitment to radical socio-economic reform and to prevent back-sliding under pressure from right-wing elements. Specifically, the CPI wants speedy enactment of stringent land reform legislation forcing the states to cut the ceilings on how much land an individual can own, to scrap the exemptions given land used for particular "plantation" crops, to close loopholes that enable landlords to evade the ceilings, and to give only token payment to former holders of expropriated excess land. The party also supports ceilings on urban property holdings and favors a substantial tax squeeze on big business and the rural rich.

While the CPI endorses India's federal system with its strong central government, the party espouses expanded state powers, particularly in economic matters. The CPI's remedy to the nation's inequitable tax system includes a broadened tax base and more state control over locally collected revenue. The CPI also wants New Delhi to force state legislatures to levy a higher tax on agricultural income, a move New Delhi is loathe to take because it fears alienating rural political support.

As a further means of curtailing central involvement in state affairs, the CPI proposes abolishing centrally appointed governors. One of the best-known means of national government intervention in the states lies in the governors' power to withhold assent to state legislation. Among the CPI's most vociferous demands, however, is an end to the practices of sending the Central Reserve Police into a state without the state's consent and of dissolving unstable state ministries and imposing direct control, called President's Rule, from New Delhi.

The CPI [redacted] probably makes some effort to infiltrate the government. On balance, there probably are few active Communists in the basically conservative state civil services or entrenched national bureaucracy. A sprinkling of prominent advisers close to Mrs. Gandhi are well known for their leftist persuasions and mirror her own attraction to Marxism. Their views, however, are fairly well balanced by moderates.

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In the international sphere, the CPI places a premium on its well-publicized relationship with the Soviet Union and adheres to the Soviet foreign policy line. It looks to Moscow for approval of its policies as well as financial patronage. Party leaders, for example, went to Moscow for talks with Soviet officials on 20-28 June and received endorsement of the CPI's campaign to rally India's "democratic forces." The special Indo-Soviet relationship, which warmed even more with the signing of the friendship treaty in August 1971 and the Soviet support for India during the Indo-Pakistani war, is gratifying to the CPI up to a point. They do raise justifiable apprehension in the CPI that the Soviets are primarily interested in seeing a stable Ruling Congress government remain in power and support for the CPI is a secondary consideration. Thus, in the few states where the CPI ran against RC candidates last March, Moscow reportedly directed Indian companies with substantial Soviet trade to reduce their kickbacks to the CPI.

### The CPM—Bad Times

*"Only in West Bengal and Kerala do we have the strength of numbers to launch powerful mass movements. In other states, we can only petition and pray."*

*P. Sundarayya, CPM General Secretary, June 1972*

At the time CPI leaders were conferring in Moscow last June, the CPM convened its ninth party congress at Madurai in the south Indian state of Tamilnadu. The tone of the meeting was subdued and defensive, reflecting the CPM's loss of power in its only two strongholds, Kerala and West Bengal, as well as the dim prospects for an early comeback. The CPM leadership had to answer charges of complacency, failure to foresee the extent of the Ruling Congress resurgence, and neglect of organizational problems. Despite these setbacks the CPM hierarchy hewed closely to previous programs.

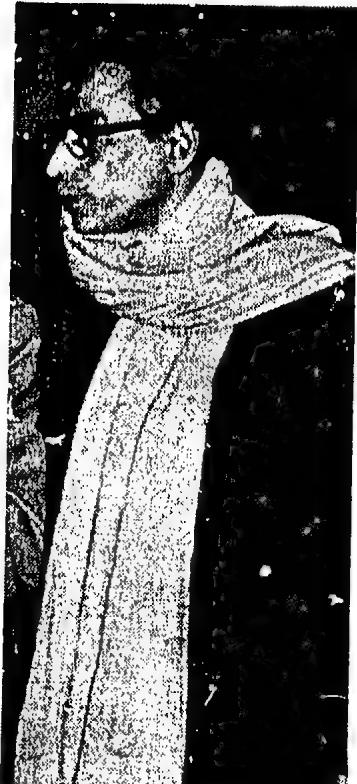
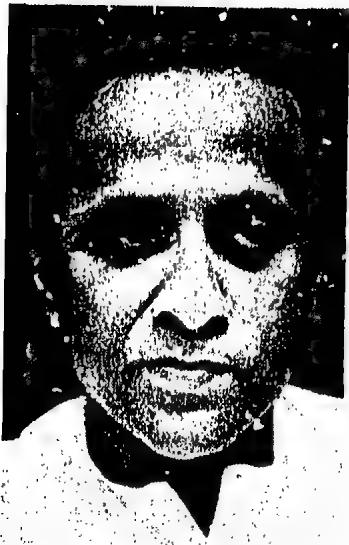
The session endorsed continued participation in the parliamentary process, overriding a minority that considers this approach ineffectual. According to General Secretary P. Sundarayya, the CPM will not resort to violence or go underground on a nationwide basis as long as the Indian Government permits it to function openly. He maintains that the parliamentary path is still a useful "auxiliary form of struggle to help the main struggle forward." The session pledged the party to attack the government on economic and political issues and instructed local units to launch a "patient" political struggle, educating the masses through a systematic campaign and exposing the superficiality of the Ruling Congress' "left and radical" promises. The session issued a rather hollow appeal for unity among leftists

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**CPM Moderate Jyoti Basu (left) Versus  
Militant Hare Krishna Konar (right)**

opposing Mrs. Gandhi's "one party dictatorship" and called for the withdrawal of repressive legislation and a basic revision of the Indian constitution.

Realizing the necessity of expanding their ranks, the Marxists agreed to back regional causes. For instance, they are now backing the concept, which has been growing in popularity of transferring powers from the Central government to the states. While the Marxists oppose any state's secession from the Indian Union, they are now willing to support regional parties like Tamilnadu's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam with its autonomy plank. In addition, the Marxists now emphasize the idea that India is multinational and demand equal treatment for all linguistic, cultural, and ethnic groups. In particular, they back the demand for an end to discrimination against

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Muslims, untouchables, and tribesmen—disadvantaged groups from which the CPM hopes to attract support. In the past, the CPM had focused on the relatively small industrial labor force, particularly in West Bengal.

As for external ties, the CPM no longer seeks to curry favor in the eyes of either Peking or Moscow and has rejected Moscow's urgings for a reunited Communist Party. At Madurai, the CPM reaffirmed its independence and harshly criticized both Moscow and Peking for dividing the Communist movement and, thereby, encouraging US imperialism. It further chastised Peking and Moscow for holding summit meetings with President Nixon. The CPM did not, in fact, invite any foreign Communists to Madurai, but it did affirm fraternal relations with the four ruling parties known for their "independent" line—North Korea, North Vietnam, Romania, and Cuba.

### **CPML—On the Skids**

India's youngest and most extreme Communist party, the CPML, beset by schisms and official harassment, faces extinction after a brief life of only three years. On 16 July, ailing Charu Mazumdar, until then the party's only top leader at large, was arrested in Calcutta. He subsequently died in a prison hospital. The 56-year-old veteran revolutionary gained national notoriety in the mid-1960s as the key organizer of the Naxalbari revolt and went on to become the founding father of the CPML in 1969. His party quickly splintered over tactical and organizational issues and became a vehicle for individual acts of terrorism and personal vendetta.

Mazumdar leaves, at most, a few hundred hard-core followers in West Bengal. His chief lieutenant, Kanu Sanyal, was recently murdered and the head of a rival faction, Ashim Chatterjee, was arrested last November. Although there may be a few potential leaders among a number of capable young Naxalites still on the loose, anyone who tries to replace Mazumdar and his dead or jailed colleagues faces an uphill fight. Indian security forces have become



**CPML leader Charu Mazumdar talks to press shortly before his death in Calcutta in July.**

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## **Naxalites During Their Heyday**



**Today the Naxalite message is being rubbed out.**

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increasingly proficient in uncovering the self-styled Maoists. West Bengal police are aided by a three-year extension of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act that permits them to detain suspects for a year without trial.

Outside West Bengal, a number of independent Maoist groups sprang up after 1967, but attempts to cooperate on a widespread or sustained basis have failed. In a last gasp the "All India Coordinating Committee for the Unity of Communist Extremist Groups" was established last year, but there is no evidence it is having any more success than previous efforts to forge a national extremist movement. Even in its 1969-70 heyday, the Naxalite movement was highly fragmented. It is difficult to estimate total membership, but the number of active radicals today is probably only a tiny fraction of the some 10,000 who in 1970 were associated in some way with the Naxalite cause. Nonetheless, a few disparate extremist bands are still advocating armed guerrilla actions and the annihilation of "class enemies"; others emphasize the need for greater preparation for the eventual revolutionary uprising. In either case the potential for growth or influence is small.

#### **Local Successes, at Times**

Of India's 21 states, West Bengal and Kerala are the only ones in which the Communists ever secured sufficient votes to head coalition governments. In West Bengal, the CPM has fallen on hard times, and today is skulking in the background, while the CPI participates in the congress-dominated government. In Kerala, the CPI/CPM game of musical chairs goes on, with little actual effect on government policies. But in both states the Communists have popular support and remain a factor in local politics.

#### **West Bengal**

The 1967-70 period was a nightmare for the Congress Party in West Bengal. In 1967, 20 years of unbroken Congress Party domination was abruptly terminated by the voters, and the CPM took up the task of ruling this difficult state. Three times the CPM headed coalition governments of short duration, enough to prove to Bengali voters that the CPM had no magic for alleviating the state's economic problems or curbing lawlessness. By March 1972 the CPM was out of office, perhaps for good.

In March, the alliance of the Ruling Congress and the CPI captured 90 percent of the state assembly seats, leaving the CPM no course but to denounce the election as rigged and boycott the assembly. The winners did resort to strong-arm tactics, in some cases hiring Naxalites to fight CPM members in the streets. The landslide did reflect Prime Minister Gandhi's popularity—even in a region where north Indians, like her, are generally held

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in disdain. It also reflected popular approval of the resolution of the Bangladesh problem, and a well-organized door-to-door campaign undertaken by enthusiastic youth groups.

The shock to the CPM naturally intensified the internal squabbling and could eventually result in a split along the customary moderate/militant lines. The moderates, led by old-time Communist boss Jyoti Basu, had been strengthened by CPM success in the 1967 and 1969 elections and establishment of CPM-led coalitions. The party's gradual decline in subsequent years tended to bring into prominence a militant faction favoring development of an underground in preparation for armed revolution in the countryside. The militants under Hare Krishna Konar argued, albeit unsuccessfully, against entering the 1972 election. The resulting debacle led them to see even less chance of reaching power by parliamentary means, given the increasing prestige of the Ruling Congress and its student (Chatra Parishad) and youth (Yuva Congress) wings, as well as its successful forays into the Communist-dominated trade union field. CPI proposals for reuniting the two Communist parties are considered by hard liners to be a ploy to lure moderates back to the CPI and thereby isolate the hard liners.

Politics in West Bengal are fluid. Frustrated and bitter, CPM leaders are searching for strategies that will not only meet the current political situation, but also pacify discontent within the party and hold on to the constituency that gave it a still impressive 27 percent of the popular vote in March.

There are indications that CPM and CPML elements in West Bengal, Bihar, and Tripura have established some contacts with their fragmented and poorly organized Communist counterparts across the border in Bangladesh.

Small amounts of ammunition and weapons from Bangladesh have reached extremist hands in West Bengal, and Indian officials have alerted Dacca to the danger of allowing a cross-border relationship among radicals to flourish. Capable Indian security forces, armed with special powers of arrest and detention, are intensifying efforts to intercept trans-border smuggling. Beginning in September, the two countries will require passports and visas for crossing the border.

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### Kerala

The southern coastal state of Kerala was the first Indian state to be ruled by Communists. It still has one of the nation's largest percentages of Communists. In addition, it is India's most densely populated and most literate state. Widespread education and 44 daily newspapers help cultivate a

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populace with an exceptional degree of political consciousness. Competition among four distinct population groups—caste Hindus, non-caste Hindus, Christians, and Muslims—gives rise to unusually complex communal and regional problems that breed persistent political instability.

The CPI and CPM have taken turns at heading the government. Today the CPI leads a two-year-old united front with a wafer-thin majority. The inclusion of the Ruling Congress in this coalition represents a landmark, for this is the first time the party has agreed to participate in a coalition government in Kerala. Many members, and particularly the youth wing, argued against the decision, maintaining the Ruling Congress should try to win its own majority, unblemished by government decisions that prove unpopular. Meanwhile, the CPM leads the opposition and is looking for ways to recapture the power it lost with the collapse in October 1969 of the government it had dominated. The CPM's latest tactic, a land-grab campaign, is floundering almost to the point of embarrassment.

A small number of Naxalites are still active in Kerala, but the police have been largely successful in containing them. During the height of Naxalite activity the province harbored at least five extremist factions with about 4,000 members. The remnants have shown little interest in cooperation with extremists in other states, since they prefer armed attacks to the prevailing trend toward organization, recruitment, and training.

### **A Patchy Outlook**

The threat of violent revolution led by Communist extremists—a specter that troubled Indian authorities a few years ago and caused major disruption in Calcutta—has dissipated. Small radical fringe groups in West Bengal, Bihar, Kerala, the Punjab, and in the hills of northeast Andhra Pradesh continue to plot revolution, but have little chance for success. Barring widespread despair over the lack of economic progress or unforeseen political turmoil, the extremists probably will be limited in the next several years to debating strategy and basic organizational work, with only an occasional armed foray against a “class enemy” or a rival left-wing group.

Neither the CPI nor CPM has the capacity to make a serious grab for national power. New Delhi's intelligence apparatus has penetrated both parties and monitors their activities closely. The police and army are well disciplined and have little difficulty in containing Communist-inspired disruptions or agitation. Nonetheless, the CPI and CPM are capable of embarrassing the government on specific issues. In 1970, for instance, the

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CPI, following the Naxalbari revolt, organized a land-grab campaign and succeeded in attracting considerable public support. The widely publicized scheme probably prodded the Ruling Congress into giving more serious consideration to the problem of rural poverty and perhaps to tailoring its 1971 and 1972 election campaigns around the issue. At the same time, the Communists play a counter-productive role in the labor field. Communist-backed strikes arising from often unreasonable demands on management have done little more than heighten labor unrest and reduce industrial production.

In the coming months, the CPI and CPM will do what they can to exploit Mrs. Gandhi's public commitment to reduce poverty. Their search is for issues. Much of the hue and cry arising from the land-ceiling issue stems from leftists. The government tried to procrastinate by shunting this sticky problem from committee to committee and finally offered a watered-down program. The states have been instructed to enact new land-ceiling laws by the end of 1972 in accord with these guidelines, but this seems an almost impossible deadline and binding enforcement is a long way off. Despite her campaign rhetoric, Mrs. Gandhi is responsive to political pressure from the large landowners who fill party coffers and enjoy unprecedented profit from the bountiful new strains of wheat and rice. The Communists will doubtless raise a cry for ceilings on urban property as well. So far,



At every press conference I am asked when are you going to begin as if it is a curtain which you can lift and throw away or something like that. These are programs which have begun; many of them have already shown results and the others, month by month are progressing forward and they have made a tremendous difference to the country. I do not think there is any doubt about it at all.

Prime Minister Gandhi  
12 July 1972

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several states have passed legislation for the redistribution of "excessive" urban holdings, and others have taken steps to check the transfer of property prior to imposition of ceilings.

The Communists' best hope is that the Gandhi administration will fail to deliver on its promises to reduce disparities in income and opportunity, provide more jobs, and improve the lot of the little man by controlling prices and curbing concentrations of economic power. Mrs. Gandhi claims her anti-poverty campaign is under way, but so far few Indians have seen much tangible change. Food prices have risen 11 percent in a year, jobs are no less scarce, and many are cynical about the likelihood of divesting the powerful of their wealth.

In New Delhi, the spotlight is on the economic ministries, with public demands for much higher performance. A minor cabinet shuffle in late July was designed principally to enhance economic performance. A number of younger, left, intellectual, and technocratic individuals were given greater responsibilities. In addition, six cabinet members in charge of economic ministries have set up an informal committee to accelerate implementation of economic policies. The Communists will be watching the results closely.

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